

# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION for transportation planning in the Lower CT River Valley Region **PLAN**

Public Comment Period: July 30, 2015 thru September 16, 2015

Adopted: October 28, 2015

Draft Coronavirus revision: August 20, 2020



## Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

145 Dennison Road Essex, CT 06426 | [www.rivercog.org](http://www.rivercog.org)



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# Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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## Metropolitan Planning Organization

It is the policy of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (RiverMPO) to provide public access and involvement under a true collaborative planning process in which the interests of all of the stakeholders - public and private - are reflected and considered. Accordingly, it is the RiverMPO's intent to make both its policy and technical process inclusive of and accessible to all of these stakeholders. The RiverMPO notes in structuring this public involvement process/public participation plan that many additional opportunities for access and involvement exist at the state and local jurisdictional levels through local, sub regional, and state sponsored activities associated with transportation planning in Connecticut.

### Policy Goals

The RiverMPO believes that public input into its process is valuable and makes its products better. Regional transportation planning cannot, and should not, be based simply upon technical analysis. The qualitative information derived from citizen involvement is essential to good decision-making.

The RiverMPO Participation Plan is designed to be goal-oriented. The Policy Statement provides a philosophy around which to build a regional transportation participation program that will accomplish the following goals:

*Effective communication and messaging of information leading to knowledgeable, informed constituencies.* The RiverMPO will disseminate information about programs and projects through a variety of conduits. Information will be presented in a manner that is clear and tailored to each of the RiverMPO's constituencies.

*Involvement from diverse participants and opportunities for constituency building.* The RiverMPO will continue to encourage participation from diverse constituencies and to provide forums for discussion about transportation issues that are responsive to the interests of different constituencies.

*Open access to information and participation.* The RiverMPO will work to improve access to technical and planning documents and where appropriate, tailor these documents to be accessible to more constituencies. Opportunities for participation in RiverMPO meetings and in committee meetings will be clearly defined and provided for at each meeting.

*Receipt of public comment and provision of meaningful feedback to constituencies.* The RiverMPO will provide information on how comments will be considered in the planning process, including the development of the Regional Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program, and acknowledge that comments were received and considered.

*Develop a "regional story" that is clear and compelling.* The RiverMPO will communicate how regional transportation planning plays a vital role in coordinating planning activities on many levels.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ed Bailey, Secretary

MONTH, DAY, YEAR



# Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments

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**Metropolitan Planning Organization**

## Resolution to Adopt the LCRVMPO Public Participation Plan

WHEREAS, the Lower CT River Valley Council Metropolitan Planning Organization, is responsible for transportation planning in Lower CT River Valley region; and

WHEREAS, the Lower CT River Valley Council Metropolitan Planning Organization, is responsible for developing and maintaining the Public Participation Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Planning Organization staff has worked with the transportation stakeholders including Middletown Area Transit and the Estuary Transit District, to develop the Public Participation Plan; and

WHEREAS, an open public comment period for the Public Participation Plan was held from MONTH DAY, YEAR, through MONTH, DAY, YEAR

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Lower CT River Valley Council Metropolitan Planning Organization does hereby adopt the Public Participation Plan.

Adopted on MONTH, DAY, YEAR.

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Ed Bailey, Secretary



# PURPOSE

## of the Public Participation Plan

The Lower Connecticut River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (LCRVMPO) partnering with the region’s Estuary Transit District and the Middletown Area Transit District, seeks to provide an open process that offers reasonable access to information, timely public notice, full public access to key decisions, and support for early and continued involvement of stakeholders in the metropolitan transportation planning process.

There are two intended audiences for the Public Participation Plan. First, the Public Participation Plan serves as a guidebook for the public as to how and when they can engage in the regional transportation planning and decision-making process. Second, the Public Participation Plan clearly outlines the policies and procedures for those responsible for engaging the public in the regional planning process. That is, LCRVMPO boardmembers, subcommittee members and planning staff.

The Public Participation Plan is organized into several sections:



### *Public Involvement Policies*

This section outlines the process and procedures the LCRVMPO will follow when conducting public involvement. It includes such things as how the public can submit comments, what the LCRVMPO will do with the comments it receives, when public meetings or comment periods will be held, and how the public can find out how to get involved.

### *Strategies for Outreach, Education & Engagement*

The tools and techniques used to educate and engage the public in the regional transportation planning process.

### *Evaluation*

The tools used to measure both the quantity and quality of interactions with the public.

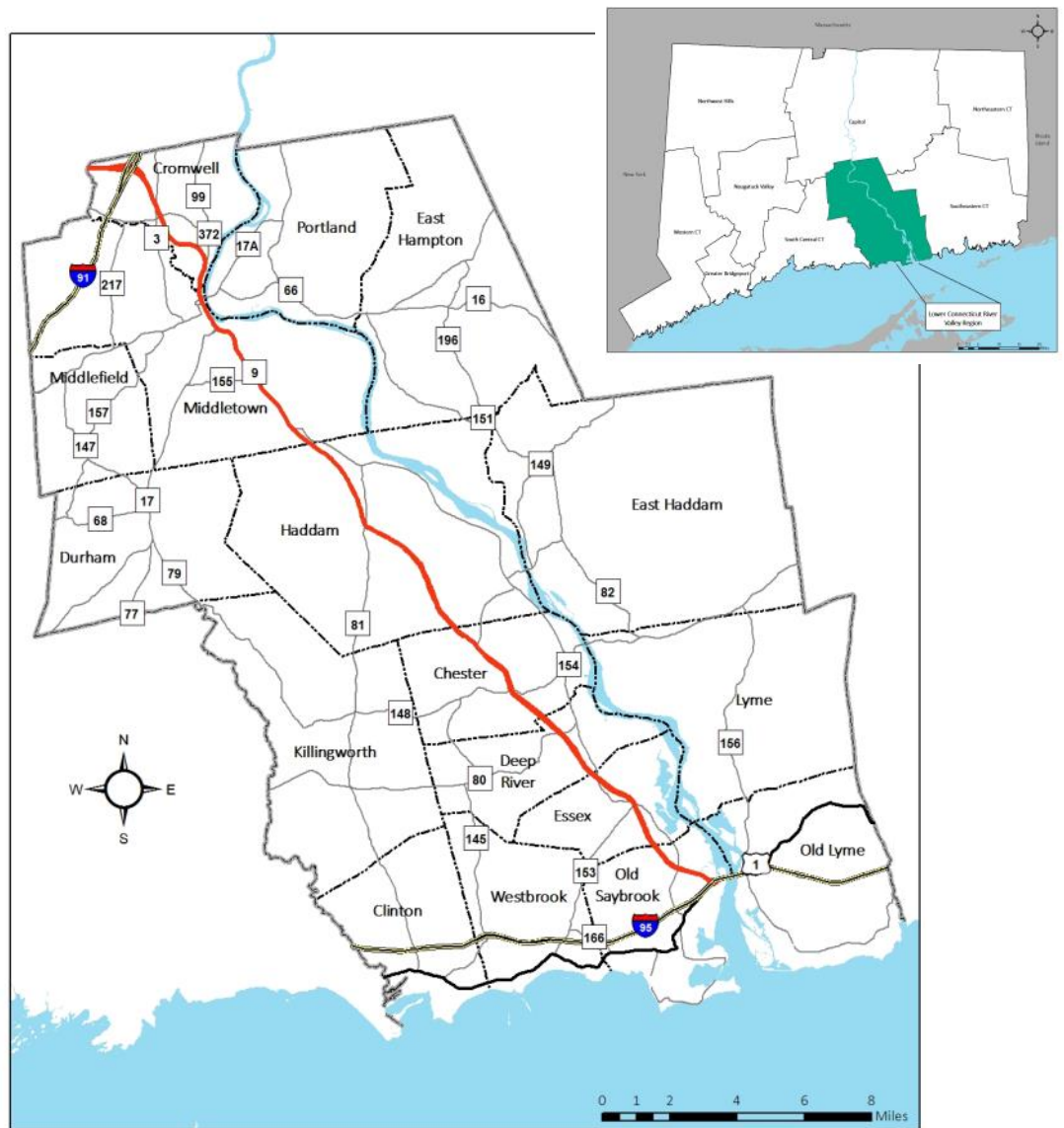
### *Additional Resources*

Information and links to more information on the planning process and federal regulations.





*The Lower Connecticut River Valley Region has seventeen member towns including Chester, Clinton, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Killingworth, Lyme, Middlefield, Middletown, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland and Westbrook.*



# ABOUT US

## *Lower Connecticut River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization*

The LCRMPO (*RiverMPO*) is the federally established Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Lower Connecticut River Valley Region.

As an MPO, LCRMPO is directly responsible for making sure that any funding approved for transportation projects and programs is based on a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive (3-C) planning process. Transportation projects and programs that receive federal transportation funding in our region go through this planning process. Public engagement is a key part of this process.

### *What is RiverMPO responsible for?*

The RiverMPO brings together the region's decision-makers, government agencies, interested parties, and the public to examine and plan for the region's future.

To meet its mission, the RiverMPO develops long-range transportation plans and short-range transportation programs, as well as a report that details the impact of these proposed transportation investments on the region's air quality. The RiverMPO also develops an annual work plan and budget called the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). The UPWP includes a variety of studies and projects in areas such as public participation, environmental justice and transportation equity, and planning for various types of transportation (bicycle, pedestrian, freight, transit, etc.). The UPWP also serves as a basis for the development of the ongoing short and long-range transportation plans, and related air quality analysis.

In addition, the RiverMPO has a number of subcommittees and advisory groups that focus on specific technical and policy areas. All meetings of the RiverMPO and subcommittees are open to the public.

### *Who serves on the RiverMPO?*

The RiverMPO has a twenty-one member board representing: Chester, Clinton, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Killingworth, Lyme, Middlefield, Middletown, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland, Westbrook, the Estuary Transit District, the Middletown Area Transit District, the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce, and the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

RiverMPO receives staff support through its host agency, the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG). RiverCOG is an organization of the region's elected executives who are committed to identifying regional interests and developing collaborative strategies, plans and programs that will improve the quality of life and economic vitality throughout the region.

RiverMPO meetings are generally held at the RiverCOG offices located at 145 Dennison Road, Essex, CT 06426.

To learn more about the RIVERMPO and the metropolitan planning process, or

To learn more about the RiverMPO and the metropolitan planning process, or to see a current calendar of meetings and events, visit [www.rivercog.org](http://www.rivercog.org)

# *POLICIES & PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT*

Public participation is an essential part of a meaningful transportation planning process that helps the RiverMPO comply with federal requirements and goals. Further, the RiverMPO affirms that it is important to ask for public participation, not just wait for it. Thus, the RIVERMPO seeks to engage people and organizations early and often using a variety of methods.

The RIVERMPO's public involvement program are guided by the following principles:

## **Provide adequate and timely public notice for key decisions**

It is critical that the public is informed, in a timely manner, of key upcoming decisions. This information will be provided in plain language that enables the public to find, understand and use information they need or are asked to review.

## **Offer public access to the decision-making process**

It is vital that the public is provided reasonable access to the information necessary for meaningful participation in the decision-making process. Meetings will be open to the public and include opportunities for public comment when applicable.

## **Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input**

It is essential to respect and seriously consider input that is received, not just collect it.

## **Educate the public about transportation issues and engage them in the regional transportation planning process**

Informing and educating the public about transportation planning issues and the transportation planning process is key to obtaining good quality public input. In addition, RiverCOG staff engages the public in a number of topics such as pedestrian and bicyclist safety, air quality, land use strategies, and clean commuting options such as biking to work, ridesharing and teleworking.

## **Involve persons and groups typically under-represented in transportation decision-making or with special transportation needs**

Effective transportation planning must include the participation of those whose everyday lives are critically affected by how they are able to get to work, home, school, stores, and services. Particular emphasis will be placed on involving persons and groups typically under-represented in transportation planning such as those with special transportation needs, including people with disabilities, low-income, minority, and elderly populations.

## **Improve upon the public involvement process through periodic evaluation**

The public will be involved in providing periodic feedback on the public involvement process. Federal law and planning regulations also guide the regional public involvement process. See pages 20-21 for more information about these regulations.



# WHO WE SEEK TO CONSULT IN THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

Federal regulations related to planning, environmental justice and civil rights cite specific “interested parties” that are to be consulted and engaged in the metropolitan transportation planning process. These groups are listed below.

**Affected public agencies**

**Individuals**

**Representatives of the disabled**

**Freight shippers**

**Providers of freight transportation services**

**Limited English proficient persons**

**Low-Income communities**

**Minority communities**

**Other interested parties**

**Representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities**

**Private providers of transportation**

**Representatives of users of public transportation**

**Representatives of public transportation employees**



In order to achieve widespread engagement and consultation, RiverMPO has identified a number of additional groups to include in the process when possible. These groups are listed below.

**Affordable housing groups**

**Business groups**

**Civic organizations**

**Community & economic development organizations**

**Commuters**

**Elected officials**

**Environmental groups**

**Environmental justice organizations**

**Higher education institutions**

**Individuals with low literacy**

**Public health organizations**

**Religious organizations**

**Neighborhood/Beach Community Associations**

**tions**  
**Organizations focused on aging**  
**Social service organizations (veterans, homeless, mental health, etc.)**  
**Transit dependent persons**  
**Workforce Development agencies**  
**Youth**  
**Tourist Venues and Attractions**

# HAVING YOUR SAY

## Policies and Procedures for Public Comments

RiverMPO encourages public comments and provides the public with a variety of ways to voice their opinions and share their ideas.

### Public Comment Periods

A key opportunity for the public to share their thoughts and ideas is during public review and comment periods. A review and comment period of at least 30 days will be held for the following:

- **Long-range Transportation Plan** (*multi-year development with several opportunities to comment on goals, projects, executive summary, etc.*)
- **Short-range Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**
- **Air Quality Conformity Determination**
- **Amendments to the 3 documents listed above**
- **Federal Certification Review**
- **Unified Planning Work Program**
- **Public Participation Plan** (*review and comment period of at least 45 days will be held for the Public Participation Plan.*)



RiverMPO in consultation with “interested parties,” will review all of the plans listed above at least every 4 years and update as necessary. Information necessary for the public to understand and comment on each document will be released to the public for review. This includes items such as a readable, public-friendly executive summary, information posted on our web site and/or in printable flyer format, detailed project sheets or reports, and links to project or sponsor web sites for comprehensive information.

### How to submit comments

RiverMPO prefers comments in writing (as identified below) to accurately respond to your concerns. If you need assistance submitting a written comment, please contact the Public Involvement Coordinator at 860-581-8554 or email your comments to [info@rivercog.org](mailto:info@rivercog.org). Please send all comments in writing using one of the following methods:

**Mail:** RiverMPO  
145 Dennison Road  
Essex, CT 06426

**Fax:** 860-581-8543

**E-mail:** [info@rivercog.org](mailto:info@rivercog.org)

## Public Participation at RiverMPO Meetings

RiverMPO holds meetings regularly to discuss current activities and events, as well as vote on key decisions. An opportunity for the public to address RiverMPO on issues related to the transportation planning process is provided at the beginning of each meeting for up to 15 minutes. Should any major issues arise that require additional time, it will be at the discretion of the Chair to take appropriate action to extend the time limit. RiverMPO also allows public comment on any action item.

The public can also make comments in person at the following meetings.

**RiverMPO meetings (scheduled monthly)**

**Public meetings (scheduled as needed)**

Visit [www.rivercog.org](http://www.rivercog.org) or call 860-581-8554 for a current schedule of meetings. All comments must be received by the close of the comment period.

### How Your Comments Will Be Used

Consideration and Response to Public Comments Received During Comment Periods. RiverMPO recognizes and values public input, therefore RiverMPO will follow this process for all comments submitted during a comment period:

- All RiverMPO members will receive a copy of the comments prior to taking action.
- All organizations/individuals who submit a comment in writing and include their contact information will receive a response to their comment.
- Every effort is made to send a response to the author prior to a final vote on the action item.
- Comments received using the methods detailed above are documented as part of the public record and are posted online at [www.rivercog.org](http://www.rivercog.org)
- RiverMPO staff is responsible for coordinating a response to comments in a timely manner for RiverMPO consideration.



### Comments received via Social Media



RiverMPO understands the value and importance of reaching the public through a variety of means, including social media. RiverMPO currently maintains accounts on various social media outlets and uses them to share information, engage the public, and collect comments. When possible, staff will use commonly used or custom hashtags (or other appropriate metadata tools) to reach a wider audience or collect comments on a specific project or plan.



Comments received via social media will be shared with the River MPO as follows:

- Comments relate to a RiverMPO action item open for public comment; and
- Comments were submitted through RiverMPO identified social media accounts or custom hashtags; and
- Comments are submitted within the timeframe of a public comment period.

Given the changing world of technology, staff keep abreast of changing communication tools and maintain an in-house social media guide that clearly outlines RiverMPO's use of social media in the public involvement process.

# GETTING INVOLVED

## Public Meetings

RiverMPO holds events throughout the year to address transportation issues and to deliberate on the strategies, projects, plans, and programs that the RiverMPO oversees. In addition, the RiverMPO hosts public meetings to share information and obtain feedback on various plans and projects. The RiverMPO also has a number of committees that meet throughout the year. A current calendar of meetings and events is online at [www.RiverCog.org](http://www.RiverCog.org)

### Guidelines for RiverCOG Public Meetings and Events

In accordance with RiverCOG Bylaws and federal guidance, regularly scheduled meetings and events of the RiverMPO will:

- Be governed by the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act. Some portions of meetings may be closed to discuss sensitive budget, finance, personnel, or homeland security issues. The minutes and materials presented to the RiverMPO shall be public record and shall be available for review at a place determined by the RiverMPO.
- Be posted on the RiverCOG website no less than seven (7) calendar days prior to the date of RiverMPO meetings.
- Every attempt shall be made to adhere to the seven(7) calendar day public notice to all other meetings of the RiverMPO, including meetings of RiverMPO committees, subcommittees and task forces, with the exception of the Executive Committee.
- For those without access to the RiverCOG website, a list of RiverMPO meetings is available in alternative formats upon request.
- Allow for public comment regarding all aspects of the transportation planning process.
- When possible, have RiverMPO members in attendance to listen to and discuss public comments.
- Be held at various locations throughout the region, as needed to gain public input.
- Be scheduled at various times, including evenings and weekends to maximize participation.
- Be accessible to persons with disabilities. Additional accommodations for people with disabilities will be provided on an as-needed basis, if requested 7 days in advance.
- RiverMPO staff will maintain a list of resources for auxiliary aids and services.
- As often as possible, be held in locations that are convenient to public transit and/or traditionally underserved communities.
- When feasible, be conducted using technologies such as webinars, conference calls, etc.





# Public Meeting Schedule

To reach the widest audience and participation among the diverse population in the Lower Connecticut River Valley Region, the following procedures have been outlined for major planning activities:



**Long-range transportation plan** - At least one public workshop in a central location with the region and one RiverMPO meeting at the RiverCOG office or a centralized location as needed.

**Short-range transportation program (TIP)** - A meeting at RiverCOG Office or another central location within the region as needed.

**Amendments to the Long-Range Plan or TIP** - In general, for significant project phases (construction, preliminary engineering, etc.), the meeting is held at the RiverCOG office. The RiverMPO may hold the meeting in the member town where the project is located as needed. If there are multiple amendments or an amendment is regional in nature, a meeting is held at RiverCOG office or another central location within the region.

**Comments on the corresponding Air Quality Conformity Determination** are also accepted during these meetings. Additional meetings on other plans such as the Public Participation Plan, Unified Planning Work Program, etc. may be held if needed to better inform interested persons or organizations.

*When scheduling public information and participation meetings, RiverMPO will consider significant civil, religious, and cultural holidays and do its best to refrain from holding meetings on those dates.*

## Notification of Public Comment Periods

RiverMPO places a great deal of importance on providing the public with easy access to information and timely notice about the transportation planning process. Comment periods are announced in a variety of methods, including:

**RiverCOG Website** – All documents released for public review are available online at [www.rivercog.org](http://www.rivercog.org)

**Press Releases** are sent to area newspapers and our press release subscribers, as well as being posted at [www.rivercog.org](http://www.rivercog.org)

**Announcements** are posted in various sources such as e-newsletters, social media networks, other websites and blogs, newsletters, etc. Upon request, the public may request print notification via U.S. mail.

**Print Documents** – All documents posted for comment are available to review in print at the RiverCOG office at 145 Dennison Road, Essex, CT 06426

**Advertisements** – RiverMPO will utilize a variety of outlets and media techniques, dependent upon the project, plan, and/or audience trying to be reached. Advertising plans and budgets will be developed by staff as warranted by the project or plan.

# ACCESSFOR EVERYONE

RiverMPO values the diversity within the region, as well as the importance of full and fair participation in the transportation decision-making process by those individuals and groups who have been traditionally underserved.

To ensure the public is aware of the RiverMPO's commitment to ensuring access for all, the following notice will be placed on RiverMPO agendas and meeting announcements (flyers, advertisements, etc.):

## ***Special Needs***

*RiverCOG-MPO meetings occur regularly on the fourth Wednesday of each month at 9:00 a.m. Closed audio loops and/or a sign language interpreter will be made available upon request; the former upon two week notice and the latter, secured via the Connecticut Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, with a minimum of three week notice. For assistance with other special needs, please contact the RiverCOG office at least seven (7) days prior to a regularly scheduled meeting. Foreign language translation is provided upon request with two week notice for translation of minutes or meeting attendance.*

RiverMPO is compliant with federal laws relating to the Americans with Disabilities Act, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority & Low Income Populations, and Executive Order 13166: Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency. For more information about these laws, see page 21.

In addition, the RiverMPO has a non-discrimination policy and complaint procedure under Title VI. See [www.rivercog.org](http://www.rivercog.org) for details.

## ***Electronically Accessible Formats***

Public information is made available, as appropriate, in electronically accessible formats (including the internet). Upon request, all documents available to the public are available in alternative formats for people with disabilities.

The RiverCOG website is also designed to meet the standards set forth in Section 508 of the US Rehabilitation Act to ensure accessibility and usability. Efforts are also made to improve access to the site as technology needs and use change.

## ***Online Translation Tool***

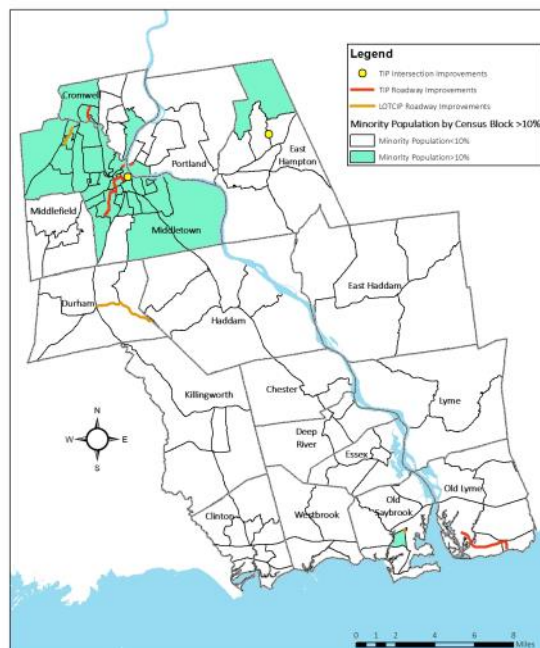
In an effort to make information on the RiverCOG website accessible to as many people as possible, an online translation tool has been incorporated into the site. Currently, the free service powered by Google Translate, allows users to choose from over 60 languages. The translation service is available on each page of the RiverCOG website. RiverMPO continues to explore emerging technologies and services to improve options for limited-English proficiency. Additional translation services are also available for those who request assistance by calling 860-581-8554.

## ***Traditionally Underserved Populations***

The traditionally underserved can be defined as those specifically identified in Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice—that is, low-income populations and minority populations including Hispanics/Latinos, African Americans/Blacks, Asian Americans, Native American/ Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders—as well as other populations recognized in Title VI and other civil rights legislation, executive orders, and transportation legislation, including those with limited English proficiency such as the foreign-born, low-literacy populations, seniors, persons with disabilities, and transit-dependent populations.

*Source: [onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp\\_rpt\\_710.pdf](http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp_rpt_710.pdf)*

# OUTREACH TO TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS



Map of Minority Populations by Census Tract

**RiverMPO staff is in the process of developing a mapping tool that can be used in the analysis and evaluation of transportation plans and programs, as well as to guide outreach activities.**

The mapping tool will use census data to identify seven vulnerable populations in the region: People in poverty, Hispanic/Latino, Non-Hispanic and Non-White Minorities, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), People with disabilities, the elderly, and Car-less households. This data will be added to maps and scaled so that concentrations of vulnerable populations in the region can be identified.

The mapping tool will be used with local jurisdictions and community partners to identify individuals, organizations and communities representative of these vulnerable populations in each jurisdiction. These include neighborhood and main street associations, community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, housing associations, nonprofits etc. This information allows staff to reach out to these groups and help ensure their voice is heard in the regional planning process.

Staff will intentionally seek out and work to build relationships with residents, community elders and other leaders in traditionally underserved communities throughout the region. Techniques to do this include:

- Person-to-person outreach at locations such as transit stations, grocery and discount stores, flea and farmers markets, laundromats, local food gatherings (ex: volunteer fire department breakfasts, church suppers), community concerts, and cultural festivals.
- Coordinate with government agencies to conduct outreach at health care centers, food banks and food stamp offices, schools, offices on aging, etc.
- Form alliances with faith-based institutions, cultural centers, community-based organizations that work with immigrants, etc.
- Conduct surveys and focus groups with individuals and organizations/agencies that work with traditionally underserved individuals.

# STRATEGIES FOR OUTREACH

## EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT



These strategies can enhance public involvement for a specific activity or assist RiverMPO in meeting specific public involvement goals. Staff review and modify these strategies on an ongoing basis. Those that best increase outreach, information, education, and involvement are continued. Those that do not, are changed or discontinued.

### **Website: [RiverCOG.org](http://RiverCOG.org)**

The core tool used by the RiverMPO to disseminate information is the website, operated by RiverCOG. This includes information on the transportation planning process, public involvement, emergency preparedness, land use, long range plans, agriculture, housing, economic development, commuter options, air quality, and activities such as socio-economic and travel demand forecasting. The site also includes a calendar of events, links to agendas, minutes, and draft documents under review, and an extensive library of electronic and print documents produced by the RiverCOG.

Opportunities for the public to provide input and formal comments are also posted on the website.

### **Visualization techniques**

Information published will incorporate images, photos, graphics, and other means of visually describing transportation issues and alternatives as a strategy for promoting public understanding of the material being presented. These approaches are consistent with the federal requirements to employ “visualization” techniques to describe plans.

### **On-line Newsletters and Social Media**

RiverMPO periodically produces a number of electronic newsletters. RiverMPO will be developing a regional e-newsletter which will provide readers with helpful information on transportation planning, environmental justice/equity, and opportunities for involvement. The purpose is to encourage awareness and participation at the regional, state, and local levels. Other e-newsletters include bicycle/ pedestrian, transit, environment, and the long-range transportation planning process. Information is also shared on RiverCOG’s Facebook site.



## EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT *continued...*

### **Produce and distribute Print Documents**

Produce and distribute print documents such as newsletters, white papers, and fact sheets to include timely information on targeted topics related to transportation planning and public participation activities. Make these publications available online as well.

### **Maintain contact lists**

Maintain contact lists to include current and potential stakeholders.

### **Develop an outreach and education program**

Produce such materials as pamphlets, brochures, and workshop outlines that can be used in various presentations and for distribution. Some of the materials can target non-traditional participants. Periodically review and update materials.

### **Publicize RiverMPO activities**

Create and maintain a media strategy to publicize RiverMPO activities through the RiverCOG website, newsletters, internet radio, and other media. Provide media with periodic updates of RiverMPO activities as well as press releases to announce public comment periods for major transportation planning products and activities.

### **Partner with others that influence/conduct outreach**

Create and maintain partnerships with a wide range of outreach professionals, community groups, jurisdictions, and agencies. Utilize these resources to publicize activities and events to reach a broader audience and/or take leadership role in public participation efforts in their area.

### **Build relationships with stakeholders**

Build relationships with stakeholders to maintain public input on transportation and to garner continued interest.

### **Seek out/build relationships with traditionally underserved community leaders and non-traditional participants.**

Identify and meet with organizations and community leaders who represent traditionally underserved populations. The purpose is to build relationships and earn trust with groups and leaders as well as identify strategies to bring traditional non-participants into the planning process.

### **Meet in convenient and accessible locations for optimal attendance**

Hold meetings, activities, and other public involvement events at various geographic locations at which the targeted populations congregate including community centers, fairs and festivals, churches, and other popular destinations. Meetings located on transit lines are most accessible.

### **Conduct interactive and informational workshops**

Host workshops on specific transportation planning topics or general process. Provide opportunity for comment through interactive discussions, comment sheets, and/or verbal comments. Use interactive activities, games, tours, and other techniques to illustrate and discuss transportation issues, projects, and needs in a meeting setting.



## EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT *continued...*

### Hold open houses

Present information buffet-style at tables and exhibits around the room with no fixed agenda or formal presentation. Provide opportunity for involvement through interactive exhibits, exercises, comment sheets, and / or verbal comments.

### Hold public meetings

Provide information and a setting for formal public comment or discussion at various steps in the planning process. These meetings will be held at various locations throughout the region and will be scheduled at various times, including evenings and weekends to maximize participation by a wide-range of stakeholders, including those traditionally underserved.

### Sponsor Podcasts, Webinars or Webcasts of Meetings

In order to reach a greater number of people, RiverMPO is seeking, to the extent possible, to employ Internet-based technologies such as webcasts and webinars to share information and gather input from a wider range of participants. Online trainings on various topics of interest to interested stakeholders, local organizations, and regional planning partners may be held. Speakers may be invited to share information on best practices from around the country or current topics of interest to the region.

### Advertise Opportunities for Involvement

RiverMPO uses a variety of outreach methods to reach out to the public and notify them of opportunities to be engaged in the process. Advertising techniques could which may include:

- Print advertisements or notices in area newspapers and community bulletins, including the region's major English-language newspaper, Spanish-language newspaper, and/or minority-community newspaper.
- Posters or flyers on transit vehicles, in an effort to reach transit-dependent populations and other transit riders.
- Online advertisements on local news media websites, targeted ads on social media pages, etc.
- Libraries – Send flyers and a print copy of the document to a number of area libraries and/or government offices with a request that the documents are displayed.
- Radio or TV announcements
- Direct mail

### Maintain and promote education opportunities for MPO board members

Maintain a speaker's bureau and a set of standard presentations about the MPO process and other relevant topics. Train RiverCOG members, staff, and other volunteers to present information to educate a variety of organizations, businesses, and other groups.

### Conduct surveys and focus groups

Gather information on people's perceptions, preferences, and practices via surveys. Conduct small group discussions to receive and gain perspectives, insights, and opinions on a single topic or project.



# EVALUATION

Best practice methods of communicating with the public are continuously identified and implemented when possible. RiverMPO along with staff support, also periodically reviews the effectiveness of its public participation program and techniques. A variety of tools are used in an effort to measure both quantity and quality of interactions with the public. Evaluation results are used to modify methods as appropriate in order to maximize effectiveness.

## Performance Measures for Public Involvement

In order to gauge the effectiveness of its public involvement efforts, RiverMPO focuses on two main areas of evaluation:

- 1.The process and tools used to implement the Public Participation Program, and
- 2.The outcome of public participation.

These evaluation techniques include the following:

**Surveys or Polls**—Surveys and polls provide important feedback on a variety of topics, including the readability of information distributed; usefulness of public meetings or events; usefulness of techniques utilized, etc. Surveys will be developed to evaluate the effectiveness of the goals for public involvement as seen on page 7. Examples of the types of surveys that can be utilized are listed below.



- **During comment period to gather input** – Staff make survey available via website, e-newsletters, etc. to provide the public an easy way to submit comments or register support/opposition to a plan or project. Poll attendees of public meetings to determine if questions were answered adequately.
- **After a comment period or major planning activity** – Staff send out a survey within 30 days to individuals/organizations who submitted comments/questions or attended a meeting. This will allow the RiverMPO to obtain feedback from participants about the information provided, the ease of submitting comments, etc. In addition, a general interest survey is available in an effort to obtain feedback from those who did participate in order to identify any barriers to participation or opportunities for improvement.
- **Public Involvement Survey** – Staff send out periodic survey to gauge familiarity with the RiverMPO, effectiveness of current outreach techniques, suggestions for improvement, etc.

## Evaluation of Outreach Tools

There are a number of different performance measures that can be used when implementing the Public Participation Plan.

Examples are listed below:

Tool	Sample Evaluation Measure
Press Releases	Number of press releases distributed, opened (online), and published
Mailings	Number of pieces sent and number returned
E-newsletters	Number of e-newsletters sent and opened; click-through rate for links
Advertisements (Online)	Number of impressions; Click-through rate
Advertisements (Print)	Number in Circulation, Percent of Readership, Number of Readers per copy
Website	Number of hits, visitors, percent change in visitors before/ after outreach initiative
Survey	Number of surveys sent; Percent completed
Public Meeting / Event	Number of attendees; Percent of affected community members at meeting  Number of individuals notified; Number attended; Percent found meeting helpful  Quality and relevance of comments submitted or questions asked
Mailing List	Number of names and contact information in our database
Outreach	Number of presentations made to outside organizations  Number of festivals and events attended

### Staff Debriefings





## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Glossary of Planning Terms

The transportation arena has a language all its own. Navigating your way through the complex web of transportation terminology can be a challenge. RiverMPO has put together a list of acronyms and commonly used words in transportation planning which can be found on the last page of this document and on the RiverCOG website: [www.RiverCOG.org](http://www.RiverCOG.org)

### Effective Participation in the Regional Transportation Planning Process

This short video, produced by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) is a great way to learn more about the regional transportation planning process and how to be effectively engaged.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCY1SbtBhS4>



### Making Public Comments at RiverMPO Meetings: A Brief How to Guide

At the beginning of each meeting of the River Metropolitan Planning Organization Meetings (RiverMPO), the public have an opportunity to make comments. These meetings are very important, regular, on the record opportunities to be heard by RiverMPO members. If you have a series of questions, RiverCOG staff are available to help you gain information prior to making comments at RiverMPO meetings. This is an effective strategy for getting your message heard and make the most impact.



The 2015 RiverCOG/MPO Board members

## *Federal Regulations for Public Involvement*

- Public involvement in metropolitan transportation planning has long been a federal requirement. Federal law includes a number of specific requirements and performance standards and expectations for state departments of transportation and MPOs during transportation planning. This core set of requirements and performance standards have been amended and reinforced through additional transportation and environmental legislation, and related regulations and orders addressing environmental justice and persons with disabilities. Currently, regulations related to public participation require the RiverMPO to:
- Provide adequate public notice of public participation activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points, particularly as it relates to the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP);
- Provide timely notice and reasonable access to information about transportation issues and processes;
- Employ visualization techniques to describe the plan and TIP;
- Make public information available in electronically accessible formats and use the World Wide Web;
- Hold any public meetings at convenient and accessible locations and times;
- Demonstrate explicit consideration and response to public input received during the development of the plan and TIP;
- Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services;
- Provide additional opportunity for public comment on the plan or TIP, if the final version differs significantly from the version that was available for public review and raises new material issues that interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen;
- Coordinate with the statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes;
- Periodically review the effectiveness of the procedures and strategies contained in the Public Participation Plan;
- Hold a minimum public comment period of 45 calendar days before the initial or revised participation plan is adopted; and
- Hold a comment period of at least 30 calendar days for the plan, TIP and major amendments.

For more information about public involvement and metropolitan planning, visit

[http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public\\_involvement/](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/)

## Additional Federal Laws

RiverMPO also complies with the following federal laws:

### **Americans with Disabilities Act**

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) is landmark civil rights legislation ensuring equal opportunity for people with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, state and local government services and communications. The ADA requires coordinating with disabled communities in the development and improvement of transportation services. Individuals with disabilities must also be able to access the sites where public involvement activities occur as well as the information presented. [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)

### **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based upon race, color or national origin. Specifically, 42 U.S.C. §2000d states that “No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” [www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/coord/titlevi.php](http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/coord/titlevi.php)

### **Executive Order 12898 to Address Environmental Justice in Minority & Low Income Populations**

Executive Order (EO) 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low Income Populations – The EO reinforced the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and focused federal attention on the environmental and human health conditions in minority and low income communities. Further, recent guidance issued by FHWA and FTA emphasizes the importance of considering and addressing environmental justice in all phases of the transportation planning process.

Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income. Along the same lines, transportation equity seeks to ensure that the needs of all communities, particularly low-income and minority communities are addressed in transportation policy and the transportation planning process. Additionally, transportation investments should work to ensure that both the benefits and impacts are distributed fairly. [archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders/1994.html#12898](http://archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders/1994.html#12898)

### **Executive Order 13166: Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)**

People with limited English proficiency are those with a primary or home language other than English. Due to their limited English skills, they must communicate in that primary language if they are to have an equal opportunity to participate effectively in or benefit from any aid, service, or benefit in federally funded programs and activities. EO 13166 requires any agency that receives federal funds to make their activities accessible to non-English speaking individuals.

The Lower Connecticut River Valley region is a diverse community that includes ethnic communities and people, some with limited English proficiency. RiverMPO outreach and involvement with LEP individuals includes an analysis to determine language needs of the targeted population. It also includes strategies for announcing meetings, document translation, oral communication, and other communication needs during the regional transportation planning process. [justice.gov/crt/about/cor/13166.php](http://justice.gov/crt/about/cor/13166.php)

# Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments MPO Public Involvement Update Due to Coronavirus

Public involvement requirements are being evaluated and modified as the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments MPO (RiverCOG) works to fight the spread of the Coronavirus.

As of March 14, 2020, per Governor Lamont's Executive Order no.7B, *PROTECTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND RESPONSE – FURTHER SUSPENSION OR MODIFICATION OF STATUTES*, ("Governor's E.O. 7B") the requirement to make project documents available at public view locations/physical locations and the state requirement to hold in-person open meetings have been suspended.

*Public meetings can be held remotely by conference call, videoconference or other technology, provided that: 1) the public has the ability to view or listen to each meeting or proceeding in real time, by telephone, video, or other technology; 2) any such meeting or proceeding is recorded or transcribed, and such recording or transcript shall be posted on the agency's website within seven (7) days of the meeting or proceeding, and made available within a reasonable time in the agency's office; 3) the required notice and agenda for each meeting or proceeding is posted on the agency's website and shall include information about how the meeting will be conducted and how the public can access it; 4) any materials relevant to matters on the agenda, including but not limited to materials related to specific applications, if applicable, shall be submitted to the agency a minimum of twenty four (24) hours prior and posted to the agency's website for public inspection prior to, during, and after the meeting, and any exhibits to be submitted by members of the public shall, to the extent feasible, also be submitted to the agency a minimum of twenty-four (24) hours prior to the meeting and posted to the agency's website for public inspection prior to, during, and after the meeting; and 5) all speakers taking part in any such meeting or proceeding shall clearly state their name and title, if applicable, before speaking on each occasion that they speak.*

Below are procedures RiverCOG will follow to ensure they meet the Governor's EO 7B as well as CTDOT and FHWA/FTA requirements for Public Informational Meetings required for projects receiving federal-aid related to public involvement.

## **Planning, Design, Construction, Survey, Right of Way, Maintenance, Public Transportation projects**

For federal-aid projects requiring public involvement, all pertinent project documents are to be made available online for the public to access. For Department projects, officials will post to or link from the respective webpages.

### **Advertise the Public Informational Meeting**

- Identify Title VI and Environmental Justice Populations
- Publish a legal notices or advertisement in at least one newspaper of general circulation to advertise the project informational meeting approximately two weeks prior to the public informational meeting. If Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations have been identified within the project/service area, publish the meeting notice in non-English media (print, TV, radio, website, etc.).
- Publish the notice must be on the RiverCOG website
- Mail/email notices to key stakeholders and community-based organizations
- Ensure project documents are available on the RiverCOG website
- Ensure there is an email address to receive project comments
- The required notice and agenda for each meeting will be posted on the RiverCOG website and calendar and include information about how the meeting will be conducted and how the public can access the meeting and the pertinent project documents and state the state clearly that the meeting will be recorded.
- The notice will include a statement that offers the public the opportunity to request project information be mailed to them



- The notice will include a statement that offers the public free language assistance. The notice should include contact information and procedures for requesting the services, including the deadline for requests. The following paragraph must be included in all public notices.
- The notice will include instructions on how to access the project webpage.
- The notice will include language on how individuals can access a recording of the VPIM.

**Holding a Public Information Meeting**

- RiverCOG will be using ZOOM Meetings
- RiverOG staff will generally begin the meeting, and coordinate with presenters on functionality
- Address how public comments or questions will be handled live
- Prepare guidelines for the public to participate

**Post Meeting Requirements & Documentation**

- The public should be offered a minimum of 14 calendar days (with additional days provided for more complex projects) in which to submit comments and the period should begin on the date of the Public Information Meeting.
- RiverCOG will consider all public comments in the decision-making process. RiverCOG will review public comments to determine if additional responses are required.
- All virtual public meetings must be recorded and posted on the RiverCOG website within 7 days of the meeting date.

# Abbreviations & Acronyms

“3C” – Continuing, Comprehensive, and Cooperative

AADT – Annual Average Daily Traffic

ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act

AMPO – Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations

APA – American Planning Association

AQITF – Air Quality Improvement Task Force

ATMS – Advanced Transportation Management System

AVL – Automatic Vehicle Location

CIP – Capital Improvement Program

CMAQ – Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality

CMP – Congestion Management Process CMS – Congestion Management System

COG – Council of Government

CPG – Consolidated Planning Grant

CTD – Coordinated Transit District

DAB – District Advisory Board

DOT – Department of Transportation

EJ – Environmental Justice

ETD – Estuary Transit District (9Town Transit)

FHWA – Federal Highway Administration

FTA – Federal Transit Administration

FY – Fiscal Year

FFY – Federal Fiscal Year

GIS – Geographic Information System

GPS – Global Positioning System

ITS – Intelligent Transportation System

JARC – Job Access and Reverse Commute

CTDOT – Connecticut Department of Transportation

LOTICIP – Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program

LRTP – Long Range Transportation Plan

MAP 21 – Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century

MAT – Middletown Area Transit

MOA – Memorandum of Agreement

MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

MPO – Metropolitan Planning Organization

NAAQS – National Ambient Air Quality Standards

NCPD – National Corridor Planning and Development

NHI – National Highway Institute

NHS – National Highway System

PL – Planning Funds

PPP – Public Participation Plan

PSC – Project Selection Criteria

RPO – Regional Planning Organization

Section 5307 – FTA’s Urbanized Area Formula Program (Planning)

Section 5309 – FTA’s Major Capital Investments

Section 5310 – FTA’s Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities Program

RiverMPO – Lower CT River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

SIP – State Implementation Plan (for air quality)

SOV – Single Occupant Vehicle

SRTS – Safe Routes to School

STIP – Statewide Transportation Improvement

STC – State Traffic Commission

TAC – Technical Advisory Committee

TAZ – Transportation Analysis Zone

TPB – Transportation Policy Body

TCSP – Transportation, Community, and System Preservation

TDFM – Travel Demand Forecast Model

TDM – Transportation Demand Management

TDP – Transit Development Plan

TE – Transportation Enhancement

TEA-21 – Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century

TIP – Transportation Improvement Program

Title VI – Title VI of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964,

TMA – Transportation Management Area

TOD – Transit Oriented Development

UPWP – Unified Planning Work Program

UZA – Urbanized Area

VMT – Vehicle Miles Traveled



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